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MEDIA REACTION  
SUBJECT: KUWAITI REACTION TO THE PRESIDENT'S JULY 16 SPEECH  
ON THE MIDDLE EAST

¶1. (SBU) Kuwaiti reaction to the President's July 16 speech on the Middle East has been limited so far, but what has appeared is generally skeptical or negative. A positive view came from Dr. Ahmed Nasser Mohammed Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Shaykh Dr. Mohammed Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah's Chief of Staff, who told Charge July 18 that he welcomed the President's speech and appreciated in particular the President's tough line on Hamas.

¶2. (SBU) In conversations with Poloff July 18, two members of the National Assembly criticized the President's message. Shia MP Hassan Jowhar accused American and British leaders of always making "a move" on the Palestinian issue at the end of their terms when it is "too late" to accomplish anything. Islamist MP Duaij Al-Shimmari described the speech as biased and asked "why doesn't the U.S. support Hamas, which was democratically elected, rather than the new Fatah government, which came to power through a coup?"

¶3. (SBU) The Kuwaiti press has provided scant commentary on the speech thus far, as stories on developments in Iraq and possible changes in U.S. military policy in Iraq predominate. An opinion piece by lawyer and regular columnist Dr. Abdul Mohsen Jama'i in Arabic-language daily Al-Qabas was the sole story on the President's speech, which the author characterized as "another attempt to support Israel and coerce Arabs to admit its existence." Verbal comments from other journalists to embassies were mostly negative. "Too little too late," said a reporter from pro-government daily Al-Seyassah. "It's a wish of a presidency on a deathbed" added a conservative writer from new Arabic-language daily Al-Wasat. A liberal journalist called the speech "a diversion of the public opinion away from the U.S. failure and mounting casualties in Iraq." A more moderate response came from an Al-Rai columnist, who told embassy that "the U.S. must not rely on Arab organizations to bring change. Arab summits are useless and do not result in anything. If President Bush is serious about establishing the two-state solution, then he needs to take affirmative action on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict."

¶4. (SBU) We anticipate that additional commentary on the speech will appear in the upcoming weekend press.

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